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ABSTRACT

A sample of single and married registered nurses involved in salary renegotiation disputes in three urban hospitals was used in this investigation. Questionnaires were sent to determine what implications family membership have for the work demands of employed women. Of the 719 questionnaires distributed, 467 were returned and 353 utilized. Findings revealed in this perception-based study include: (1) Both single and married employed women feel husbands either do not care if their wives make more than they do, or are uncertain of the opinions of their husbands, (2) Employed women, especially single, feel there is an economic need for their continued employment, with both married and single women perceiving a greater need for wives to work than they feel husbands do, and (3) Husbands are more likely to feel threatened by a wife's greater income than working wives realize. If the income-relevant behavior of employed females is to be fully understood or predicted, it is essential that data representing much broader segments of the population be obtained. (SN)

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What the Other Half Thinks:
The Implications of Female Perceptions
for Work Demands*

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ABSTRACT

Three hundred fifty-three registered nurses involved in salary renegotiation were asked individually for their perceptions of the economic need for continued employment, the "threat" to the husband if her salary was greater than his, and the husband's view of the need for his wife's employment. In general, most of those in the sample did not feel their husbands would be threatened if their wives had a greater income. Further, the nurse respondents generally saw a greater economic need than they felt their husbands did. A comparison is made between the perceptions of those in our sample and what other research has indicated are the perceptions of the husbands of employed females. Our data suggest that women may not be in as strong a bargaining position as men because of the lack of primary group support.

What the Other Half Thinks:
The Implications of Female Perceptions for Work Demands

Even with the growing concern for the role of women within American society little is known regarding the potential implications of female work demands for the present occupational structure. Most research has focused instead on the implications of female employment for power change in the family, fertility, role model selection for children, or division of labor within the home (Blood, 1963, 1965; Heer, 1963; Nye and Hoffman, 1963; Safilos-Rothschild, 1970^a, 1970^b). Research concerned with women in the occupational structure has been limited to discrimination in pay, absenteeism and reasons why women work (U.S. Department of Labor, 1968, 1969; Women's Bureau, 1970).

Investigation focusing on the loss of talent to society through the attrition of females, both as a structural constraint as well as a social psychological choice on the part of women, at least looks at the concerns of society from another dimension than the changing role of the family. The very fact that we do not talk about male employment (except as it relates to intergenerational mobility -- usually only the father's occupation is considered) for the role model selection of boys and girls, demonstrates a distortion of concerns with social processes and a tunnel vision of the family.

The research reported here relates to only one aspect of the larger question we are posing, namely, what implications does family membership have for the work demands of employed women? We shall

raise more questions than we will answer. We have data bearing on only one aspect of female employment. Yet we believe it is a step in the direction research should be moving. Some might say what is needed instead is information on "unemployed" women (women working in the home as wives and mothers). Women in the labor force, however, are going to be making labor demands for the employed woman. As such, what they say, do and think is extremely important for the future role of the employed female. We consider here the perceptions of both single and married women. The single when married may drop out of the labor force. Yet their perceptions are important. They can provide a clue to the degree of role change that may occur.

Consequences of Income Equality

Husbands of both working and non-working wives agree that they would feel threatened if their wives earned more money (Axelson, 1963). In a society characterized by income inequality, the belief that men would be threatened is widespread. This is an important consideration.

A study of 53 professional married women suggests that when the wife makes more there is dissatisfaction on the part of the wife, and a form of family matriarchy is more apt to emerge (Garland, 1970; Paloma, 1970). A respondent in a study by Komarovsky (1953:171) noted: "I said that my husband is proud of my career. The moment I receive some good news, a salary raise, say, I rush to the phone to tell him. But I know that part of his unalloyed joy comes from the fact that my raises do not threaten his superiority in earning capacity."

Because of such feelings, a number of women would cut down on their work rather than let their income exceed their husbands' (Poloma, 1970:19). In response to a question regarding how she would feel at the prospect of making more than her husband, a married female physician noted that "it would not be good for her marriage and would only be permitted if dire need were present" (Poloma, 1970:20). It is significant that no wife in Poloma's (1970:20) study wanted to earn more than her husband. Paloma, (1970:20) therefore, concluded that "when a wife's income is greater than her husband's (unlike differences in education or status ranking alone), the husband's role is clearly threatened". The implications in terms of labor demands by females are far reaching.

We may speculate a bit by asking what the consequences for labor demands would be if women see men threatened by their wives making a greater salary. First, there might be less agitation by women for salary equity and fringe benefits for themselves--retirement, number of paid holidays, work conditions, insurance. Second, there might be more agitation by women to obtain such economic benefits for their husbands, so that family security could improve without affecting the income differentiation.

Conversely, the feeling under discussion might result in a greater emphasis by women on conditions of work, such as job autonomy, with a reduction in emphasis upon salary. This would alter the traditional pattern of labor force negotiations which have been present to date (Harbison, 1951; Kassalow, 1967; Davey, 1972). It is also possible that up to near salary equality, married women would receive a degree

of support from their spouses. The perception of threat, however, may result in a reduction or elimination of change when equality or near equality has been reached. Thus, the occupational thrust of women would diminish.

If women do not see their salary potential as a threat to their husbands, whether or not husbands see it as such, there should be no reduction in the demands of women within the occupational arena. A readjustment in the perceived contributions of the wife's employment to the family might result. Some of the extant reasons which have functioned to negate the impact of the wife's employment on family power distribution have been identified; the wife works for pin money, she works for self-fulfillment, or she works for specific goals within the family--to get a piece of furniture, to help while the children are in college, etc.

All such contributions to the family, except for self-fulfillment, traditionally have been a part of the breadwinner's role. If these beliefs as to why women work persist, work demands of employed females would not be pervasive enough to allow a redefinition of the function of the wife's employment.

If women do not see income equity as a threat to men, even though men do, it would be necessary to resolve the resultant conflict at a more cognitive level. Both Rossi (1969) and Kinney (1971) suggest that conflict within the family will result from women's emphasis upon equality. But what mechanisms will be used by husbands and wives to resolve the dilemma? If married women learn that their spouses are threatened by their earning higher salaries, will wives drop out of

the labor force or will they reduce demands? Either action would leave it to single women to make the main thrust for salary equity in the labor market. It is, of course, doubtful whether single women could effect such change without the active support of married women within their occupational groupings.

Finally, it is possible that the attitudes of men and women in no way reflect probable behavior (e.g., although a man might say he would feel threatened if his wife earned more than he did, he might in actuality support his wife's salary demands in order to increase the spending capacity of the family).

Sample and Procedures

The purpose of our research is reflected in the following questions: Do employed women think their husbands would feel threatened if they earned more than their husbands? Do employed women think there is an economic need for their continued employment? Do they think their husbands consider their employment necessary? Is there a difference in the perceptions of married and single women on these issues? Finally, in relation to findings of an earlier study, is there a difference in the perceptions of men and women as to the potential threat of the wife making more than the husband?

Seven hundred and nineteen questionnaires were distributed in the summer of 1967 to a group of registered professional nurses employed in three urban hospitals, reflecting three different types of organizational sponsorship (religious, county and private). These hospitals employed the largest number of nurses in a Northwestern metropolitan center.

Only questionnaires were used for this analysis in which all relevant questions had been answered. Further, the separated, widowed and divorced were excluded. The number in each of these categories was not considered sufficient for analysis. Thus, of the 467 questionnaires returned, representing a response of 63 percent, 353 were utilized.

Nurses were an appropriate sample for the initial investigation of our questions since all, though their professional association, were currently involved in contract renegotiations. For them, the issues of improved work conditions and greater salary were concrete issues. Their perceptions and group action would have a very real effect on their families. Nurses also represent a major occupational grouping that continues to be almost exclusively female. If they are unable to institute change, the odds would not be better in any other occupational category.

Admittedly, our sample is drawn from among professional workers. Findings cannot therefore be generalized to other groups of employed women. Yet our research on female perceptions provides information which has seldom been considered in research. Further, our sample may not contain those women who are most affected by their husbands' attitudes toward their employment. The data reflect the result of a selective process insofar as women whose husbands would most object to their continued employment and who are most likely to perceive their husbands as threatened may not be employed and thus not a part of our sample. But data indicate (Axelson, 1963) that the husbands of wives

who work do perceive it as a threat. We cannot assume, therefore, that women who work, particularly those in our sample, will have husbands who do not care whether they are employed. The potential conflict is present. It may just be a matter of degree between working and nonworking women. Further, if adjustments in the work arena are to be made, it is precisely these women who will determine the direction of such change. Their perceptions of the possible concerns of husbands and not the perceptions of women who are outside the labor market will determine the direction of labor negotiations.

Subjects were asked several questions regarding their attitudes and their perceptions of their husband's attitudes concerning the wife's employment. Married women were to respond in terms of their own and their husbands' attitudes. Single women were to respond in terms of how they thought their husbands would feel if they were married.

Findings

Perceptions of Single and Married Females

The majority of both single and married females felt their husbands would not care if they earned more, or at least were uncertain as to their husband's probable feelings. Only 30 percent of single females and 27 percent of married females indicated it would bother

their husbands if they made more than their husbands in a typical year. Among single females, however, approximately 50 percent

(Insert Table I About Here)

responded that they were uncertain how their husbands would feel once they were married. The uncertainty about the anticipated attitudes of husbands was surprising, given the numerous sources of marital expectations of male attitudes--parents, mass media, and premarital male-female relationships.

More than 25 percent of married women in the sample also were uncertain about their husbands' attitudes. Whether such responses were prompted by an unwillingness to acknowledge a potential source of husband-wife conflict or actually represented a considered opinion based on experience could not be determined. The large percentage of both single and married females, however, who indicated they did not know how their husbands would feel, suggests that both married and single females are unsure of male perceptions in this area.

Admittedly, once married, the single women who encounter strong resistance to their continued employment might stop working. If it is assumed that attitudes of single women who continue working will approach attitudes of married women once they are married, the data further suggest that the major change in the perceptions of a single woman concerning her husband's attitude will be a change from being

unsure of her husband's opinion to feeling the husband does not care if his wife earns more. Our study shows 46 percent of the married women indicating that her husband would not care if she earned more than he. Earlier research indicates that husbands generally do not approve of their wives making more (Axelson, 1963). We wonder, therefore, what would allow females, once married, to alter their opinions of the husbands' attitudes in this direction. We further wonder what would allow 50 percent of the married females to respond that their husbands would not care in view of what husbands themselves have said.

Second, both single and married females indicated that their husbands were unlikely to see a great need for their continued employment. Three-quarters of single females and two-thirds of married females said their husbands saw little or no economic necessity for their wives to work. However, the females' own perceptions of their need to work were the reverse of those attributed to their husbands. Sixty-six percent of single and 56 percent of married females felt there was a great financial need to continue working after marriage.

It would be interesting to know with certainty whether females were aware of the disagreement between their own attitudes and their perceptions of their husbands' attitudes. Whether or not the females were aware of their own perceptual dissonance, if their perceptions of their husbands' attitudes are correct, there is a great deal of disagreement between husbands and wives as to the need for the wife to work.

Do female perceptions of the need to work affect whether she feels her husband cares if she makes more than he does?

It is possible that whether the female feels her husband would be threatened is determined by her perceptions of the economic necessity of continued employment. To test this, the wife's perceptions of the economic need for continued employment, both as she views it and as she feels her husband views the need, were analyzed in relation to whether she felt her husband would care if she made more than he did. Slightly more than one-quarter of married women who said there was a

(Insert Table 2 About Here)

high need to work, as well as 27 percent of those who said there would be little or no need to work, indicated their husbands would care if she made more than he did. There was a similar lack of relationship between the degree of need, as perceived by the female, both single and married, and whether she felt her husband would not care if she made more. The responses of both single and married females indicated that the need for their continued employment, as they viewed it, was not related to whether it would bother their husbands if they had a larger salary. At least in this area, therefore, single women are well socialized to the extent that, like married women, their views are not related to what they consider to be their husband's opinion!

It is perhaps significant that the responses of married women indicated that their perceptions of their husbands' view of the need for their continued employment also was not related to whether they felt he would care if she made more than he did in a normal year.

The percentage of females who said their husbands saw a great need for their employment and who said their husbands saw little or no

(Insert Table 3 About Here)

need was approximately the same for each category of husbands' attitudes.

Only for single women was there any relationship between their perceptions of their husbands' view of their continued employment and their husbands' attitudes about a wife making more than he does. Of the single females who felt their husbands would see little or no need for their wives to work, 35 percent indicated their husbands would care if they made more. Yet only 16 percent of the single females who felt their husbands would see a high need for his wife to work indicated their husbands would care. Therefore, only for single women was there any relationship between the husband's perception of need and whether he would feel threatened.

In comparing Tables 2 and 3 we find that for married females there is no real difference in the effect of either their own or their perception of their husbands' view of the need to work on whether husbands would be threatened if their wives earned more than they. Thus, it appears that married women exhibit a degree of perceptual consensus in the area of their employment although, again, it cannot be determined if their perceptual consensus is real or imagined. For single women, however, if they are aware of their reported perceptual dissonance, they must acknowledge that their view of the need for them to work will have little or no effect on their husbands' attitudes.

Consideration has been given up to this point to the perceptions of employed females. We suggest that it is women's perceptions of their husbands' attitudes, not the actual attitudes of husbands, that largely determine the family and work demands of women. However, we would like to compare briefly the perceptions of employed females with what has previously been determined to be the perceptions of husbands of working wives on these issues.

Axelson's study (1963) provides the most comparable information on male perceptions in the present area of concern. His data were collected in 1961 through a questionnaire mailed to husbands in a western town of 6200 people. Each respondent was asked whether he would feel inadequate if his wife earned more than he did.

(Insert Table 4 Here)

Axelson reported that 42 percent of husbands of working wives felt strongly that the husband would feel inadequate if his wife earned more, 27 percent were undecided, while 31 percent reported he would not feel inadequate. By contrast, in our sub-sample of married women, 27 percent felt the husband would feel threatened, 46 percent said he would not care (he would not feel threatened) and 27 percent said they didn't know. As can be seen, there is a 15 percent difference between the husbands of working women and the husbands' attitudes as perceived by working wives. There was no difference in the proportion of undecided respondents between husbands of working wives and employed wives, but there was a 27 percent difference between husbands and wives, and single women.

The least that can be shown from existing data is that the potential situation of the wife earning more than the husband creates a situation of great ambiguity. That 31 percent of the husbands of working wives in Axelson's study felt they would not feel inadequate if their wife made more and that 46 percent of our working wives felt the husband would not feel threatened suggests men may be less liberal on this dimension than married women suspect.

Implications of the Findings

I. Both married and single employed women feel their husbands either do not care if their wives make more than they or are uncertain of the opinions of husbands. Lessened salary demands by employed women seems unlikely based on the few who feel their husband would feel threatened. A more significant factor, however, may be the lack of consensus among employed women as a group. Increased salary demands of employed men have received the support of the family, particularly wives. Yet there is little agreement among employed women as to the threat to husbands and hence an uncertain degree of support for the increased income demands of women. The fact that a significant minority, 30 percent of the single and 27 percent of the married, are convinced their husbands would care if his wife made more may have a negative impact on the success of the employee groups bargaining for increased women's wages.

At a different level this finding might indicate that associations representing women should extend their influence, not only to employed females and their employers but also to husbands.

II. Employed women, especially single, feel there is an economic need for their continued employment. Both married and single women perceive a greater need to work than they feel their husbands do. High perceived financial need for continued employment, as viewed by single women, should provide a basis for economic demands within this group. These findings, along with previous data indicating that only a minority of single women feel their future husbands would care if their wives made more, suggest that women may pursue increased salary demands. The fact that only 57 percent of married women saw great financial need for continued employment, however, suggests that married women may not give strong support to demands for increased salary based on economic need alone. Demands made by employed women if they are to receive the endorsement of married females, therefore, will have to reflect not only economic need but other justifications as well, such as distributive justice, job incentives, etc.

That women are more likely to see a need for their continued employment than they feel their husbands do again suggests that women do not perceive widespread support from their primary group for continued economic demands, at least beyond the point of salary equity. If they are to continue working and make salary demands without encountering the opposition of husbands, then the rhetoric of such demands will have to be couched in non-economic terms, e.g., increased salary will attract more qualified people. An interesting possibility is that despite, or perhaps because of, the perceived lack of support, women will make their demands on the basis of the needs of other women, rather than for themselves, presented in the form of responsibility to their work group.

Our data suggest that present explanations regarding the functions of female employment (pin money, etc.) are inadvertently being perpetuated, since many husbands do not perceive a need for the continued employment of their wives. These arguments, although disproved for the most part, tend to keep women at an occupational disadvantage. It is ironic that women, most of whom work because of economic need, may be perpetuating the "pin money" myth by virtue of working and being married. This in itself has long range implications for labor bargaining of women.

No greater understanding of what determines whether the husband feels threatened and perceptions of economic need was provided when these responses were cross-classified. This suggests that there is no economic basis for male threat, at least as the female views it, and that employed women will be unable to use the family financial situation to anticipate her husband's reactions to her labor demands. This at the very least should be a source of ambiguity with potential conflict resulting within the family.

III. Husbands are more likely to feel threatened by a wife's greater income than working wives realize. Single women as a group express great uncertainty. To the degree that both our data and Axelson's data are comparable, salary demands of working women are likely to encounter opposition within the family. Only a minority of the employed women felt husbands would feel threatened. Yet Axelson's data indicate that nearly one-half of husbands would feel inadequate. This is likely to result in uncertainty and conflict.

If Poloma's data from 53 professional couples are generalizable, married employed women will choose not to earn more than their husbands. They will instead utilize one of the adjustive occupational techniques previously discussed, such as other types of work demands. This will blunt the income equity thrust of employed women. Single women alone will be unable to overcome the lack of support from the married women. In turn, single women, uncertain of their future husbands' attitudes, may be less confident in pursuing income equality when they observe the reticence of married women.

Conclusions

It is essential that data representing much broader segments of the population be obtained if the income-relevant behavior of employed females is to be fully understood or predicted. Our data suggest that women are uncertain or do not see a salary greater than their husbands' as a threat to their husbands. This is contrary to what others have found. Poloma (1970) and Garland (1970) suggest women do not want to make more than men. Komarovsky (1953) also reported instances in which women reported such attitudes. Axelson (1963) found that most men would be threatened if their wives made more.

We found that more than one-quarter of the women saw making more than their husband as threat. Comparing our data on married women with that of married men, the data suggest that there may well be conflict within the family or a change in the occupational demands on the part of women. That 27 to 30 percent of the females reported it as a threat means that women in the bargaining arena may have difficulty obtaining

consensus if it would involve making a salary larger than the husband's. The reason that this 27 to 30 percent is important is that threat to husband is only one reason women might not make certain economic demands. Combine this reason with other reasons for not participating and the erosion of what otherwise would appear to be substantial support for salary demands gradually decreases. For men, no such parallel is present, i.e., salary increase on the part of the husband would not threaten the usual status relationships present in the family. Perceived threat to the male is not related to perceived economic need. This suggests a lack of rationality for the threat to men, which will make it more difficult to negotiate conflicting occupational and family expectations on the part of the female worker. The question then arises: What will happen if and when the wife's salary reaches near equality with that of the husband? It appears that, for women, support of the husband will not be present. This may alter the thrust for occupational economic equality which may inhibit aspects of the civil rights demands currently being made by females.

Future research should pay more attention to the occupational role of the female (other than housewife) and look at the implications for the world of work and the way in which family membership influences work decisions. We have focused on women. There is a gap in our knowledge in this area for both men and women.

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TABLE 1
Perceptions of Employed Females by Marital Status Expressed in Percentages

A) Would Her Husband Care if She Made More than He Did?			B) Is There Financial Need for Her Continued Employment?		C) Does Her Husband See a Need for Her Continued Employment?		Total Number
Marital Status	Care	Not Care	Uncertain	Marital Status	Low Need	High Need	
Single	30.0	16.3	53.7	Single	34.1	65.9	123
Married	27.4	46.1	26.5	Married	43.5	56.5	230

TABLE 2

Single and Married Employed Female Perceptions of Whether Her Husband Would Care if She Made More by Her Perception of Financial Need for Her Continued Employment, Expressed in Percentages

Self-Perception of Financial Need for Continued Employment	Single				Married			
	Husband Care if Wife Made More				Husband Care if Wife Made More			
	Care	Not Care	Uncertain	Total Number	Care	Not Care	Uncertain	Total Number
Low Need	28.5	16.7	54.8	42	27.0	43.0	30.0	100
High Need	30.9	16.0	53.1	81	27.7	48.5	23.8	130

TABLE 3

Single and Married Employed Female Perceptions of Whether Her Husband Would Care if She Made More by Her Perceptions of Whether Her Husband Feels She Needs to Continue Working, in Percentages

	Single				Married			
	Husband Care if Wife Made More				Husband Care if Wife Made More			
	Care	Not Care	Uncertain	Total Number	Care	Not Care	Uncertain	Total Number
Perception of Husband's Attitude About Financial Need for Employment								
Low Need	34.8	16.3	48.9	92	26.4	45.3	28.3	148
High Need	16.1	16.1	67.8	31	29.3	47.6	23.1	82

TABLE 4

Believe Husband will Feel Inadequate or Threatened by Husbands of
Working Wives, Working Wives and Single Women,
Expressed in Percentages*

Sample	Believe Husband Will Feel Inadequate or Threatened			Total Number
	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Undecided	
Husbands (Axelson's Data)	42	31	27	45
Employed Married Women	27	46	27	230
Single Employed Women	30	16	54	123

* Comparison of our data with Axelson's data (1963).